

*On a passage of Giovanni Leoni, commonly called Leo Africanus, mentioning a successful attack upon the coast of Africa, by a powerful British Fleet, in the tenth century. By John Dunn, Esq., M. R. I. A.*

Read April 17, 1826.

AMONG the extraordinary persons who appeared at the court of Leo X., was one in the character of an African, who had been captured by a band of Christian corsairs, in one of their predatory cruises against the infidels, and was by his captors presented to the Pope, as a slave not unworthy of his acceptance, on account of his literary acquirements. This stranger, being apprised of his destination previous to his being presented, brought with him his since highly valued book on the Geography of Africa, which he presented to Leo. His history, as related by John Baptist Ramusio, in the first volume of his *Navigazioni et Viaggi* (I cite the third edition of his *Navigation at Viaggi*, printed by the Giunti in the year 1563), is shortly this:—He was of Mauritanian descent, himself a Moor, and born in Grenada, previous to the expulsion of the Moors by Ferdinand and Isabella; and was, with the rest of his countrymen, banished to Africa, where he continued at liberty until his capture by the corsairs. There he resided for some time at *Fez*, then a seat of civilization and science, where he applied himself to Arabian literature, and wrote several historical works in that language. His African Geography was the fruit of his extensive travels through that country. This he afterwards translated, from the original

Arabic into Italian, in the best manner he could ; and the translation, corrected, was printed at Venice by the Giunti. He conducted himself in such a manner at Rome as to obtain the favour and patronage of his master ; who, after setting him at liberty, prevailed on him to make profession of the Christian religion ; and, by the desire of the pope, at his baptism, he took the pope's two names, *John* and *Leo*, though he is now generally known by the name of *Leo Africanus*. His historical works have not been published, and perhaps not translated. Many distinguished writers have spoken of *Leo's African Geography* with approbation ; and, among them, our learned countryman, *Dr. Shaw*, (whose travels in Africa are well known), has quoted him with respect. No one of those writers, as far as I know, has noticed the following passage, which seems to merit the attention of the historian, or at least of the British antiquarian. By this it appears, that *Arzilla*, which the Africans call *Azella*, a considerable town situated upon the shores of the ocean, was built by the Romans about seventy miles from the Pillars of Hercules, and was subject to the government of *Septa* or *Ceuta*, both which are corruptions of the Roman name *Civitas*, the metropolis of the Roman province of *Mauritania Ulterior*. Upon the irruption of the Goths, *Arzilla*, with the rest of the province, was dismembered from the empire, and occupied by the Goths ; who continued in possession of it till they were expelled by the Saracens, the ninety-fourth year of the Hegira ; who continued in possession of it for two hundred and twenty years, until the English with a powerful fleet invested it ; which they did at the instigation of the Goths, although the Goths and English were at variance with each other in this respect, that, while the Goths were Christians, and did not admit the use of images in their worship, the English, on the other hand, worshipped idols ;

and *this* concord between them arose from their joint wish, by weakening the Saracens, to compel them to abandon their conquests in Europe. The English succeeded in their enterprize; the town was taken and burnt; and it continued in a state of ruin, entirely destitute of inhabitants, for nearly thirty years, when the power of the Mahometan lords and priests of Corduba having extended to Mauritania, Arzilla, by the exertions of those new masters, rose from its ashes, with renewed and increased beauty and strength. To prevent mistakes, I shall set down the Italian words, as far as relates to the situation of Arzilla, the invasion by the English, and some important facts which preceded and followed it. “Arzilla fu gran città, et edificata da Romani sul mare Oceano, vicina allo Strotto delle Colonne di Hercole, circa a settanta miglia. Questa fu suddita al Signor di Septa che era tributario de Romani. Dipoi fu presa da Gotti. Indi fu presa da Mahumettani gli anni novantaquattro di Lhegira: Essi ne furono per duganto venti anni possessori per infinoatanto, che gl’ Inglesi con una grossa Armata a persuasione de Gotti Cassediarano, ignali furono insieme nimici, percioque i Gotti erano Christiani et che gli Inglesi adoravano gli idoli. Et cio essi facerano a fine che i Mahumettani levassoro il piè dell Europa. Successe l’impresa a gl’ Inglesi; et presala Citta, la posero a ferro e a fiamme onde non vene iscampò un solo. Et cosi si rimase presso a trenta anni rouinata, et dishabitata. Ma poscia regnando i Signori et Pontefici di Cordona in Mauritania, la restaurarono, et retornarono a migliore, et piu nobile qualita, et fortezza.” This invasion of the English so unhesitatingly announced by Leo (whom he expressly states to have been idolators) if real, must have taken place, according to the dates, in the reign of Athelstan, whose Saxon subjects were Christians, and the king himself so zealous an one, that he quieted and confirmed his

tributary Sitrick (lately in rebellion) to the kingdom of Northumbria, upon condition that he should espouse his sister, and, abandoning idolatry, embrace the Christian faith: which condition he accepted. But, upon his death, his sons by a former infidel wife, persisting in their worship of idols, Athelstan forcibly expelled them from their father's kingdom; and, while one of them took refuge in Ireland, and another in Scotland, the third, Godfrid, after an unsuccessful attempt to surprise York, the capital of the kingdom, put to sea with the Northumbrian fleet, and betook himself to maritime enterprise: till, abandoning that pursuit, he returned to England, was reconciled to Athelstan, and liberally treated by him. But their ancient animosity reviving, he once more launched into the ocean upon some piratical expedition, the particulars of which are unknown to the writers of English history; and, as they say, was never more heard of. These passages in the life of Godfrid furnish facts, which, if not directly confirmatory, are at least not inconsistent with the account given by Leo of the invasion of Africa by the English in the tenth century, perhaps I might venture to say, are of such a nature as to make Leo's narrative *probable*.